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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, February 23, 1933
U. S. Department of Agriculture

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Inexpensive Clothes for the Baby." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Since spring is just around the corner, how would you like to talk about spring clothes today - spring clothes not for you or for me but for the new baby in the family? Several of my friends have been asking for help in planning an inexpensive and up-to-date layette.

The baby's job in life is to grow and develop properly. For that job he needs plenty of sleep and plenty of exercise. Also he needs to be comfortable and happy. Comfortable clothing aids quiet sleep and allows the baby freedom to exercise his small arms and legs. Any modern mother is shocked at the very thought that babies once were dressed in swaddling clothes or strapped in papoose bags. But styles for infants of only a few years ago--yes, even many styles used today are uncomfortable for babies and hard on mothers. Long skirts and slips, quantities of petticoats, starched dresses, frills and lace to irritate tender skin, tight necklines that cut and pull, gathers at necks and wrists, puffed sleeves, hard little buttons down the back to lie on--we've all seen babies wearing clothes of this sort.

The modern baby clothes designed by specialists at the Bureau of Home Economics have none of these uncomfortable features. They are designed to please both the baby and his busy mother. First and most important, these little garments are all comfortable. Then, they are inexpensive. They require less material than baby clothes of the old style. They're simple and easy to make--a point for any busy mother. And they're very easy to launder. They lie out flat so the job of ironing is simple. Finally, they go on the baby easily. That simplifies the task of dressing or undressing.

Have you ever seen a Japanese mother dressing her baby? She makes a little nest of kimonos, some thin and some heavy by slipping one garment inside another. She lays the child down on this open nest of kimonos and simply folds them around him. No struggle to pull the dress over the baby's head. No struggle to get the small hands into the tiny sleeves and to fasten all those tedious little buttons down the back.

That's the way it is with these new American baby garments. They are something like little kimonos, opening all the way down the front and generally cut on the bias to avoid uncomfortable gathers. These new garments spread flat on the table. They are cut simply, with a front opening that overlaps generously, with little tapes for fastenings, with short sleeves wide at the bottom and cut raglan style, to allow plenty of freedom for arm movements. The bias cut allows for fullness and freedom without gathers of any sort, it makes ironing easier and it requires less material than a garment cut straight. The neckline is cut low in front on all these garments so it won't pull or choke or become tight as the baby grows.

Since the baby's feet have to kick and his small knees have to be up in the air frequently, the dress overlaps to prevent gapping on such occasions. The baby can kick all he wants without exposing himself to the cold. These small dresses are all just long enough to cover the feet--about twenty inches for the average size baby.

Some mothers prefer straight instead of bias cut garments, so the specialists have designed a few models of this type. Of course, garments cut on the straight of the goods need to have added fullness at the neck to give room for growth and activity. One little pale blue baby dress in the display has this fullness put in tiny shirring done with white thread.

What fabrics are best for these modern baby dresses? Soft, durable and easily laundered materials. Fine quality nainsook or batiste or lawn are all good choices. Of course, no starch is ever used for any baby dresses.

As for the finishes around the edge of these little garments, the specialists advise soft, flat, smooth finishes that won't irritate the tender skin of necks and wrists, that are easy to make and to launder. This rules out rows of lace, rough embroideries, starched ruffles, and other fancy trims. Some of the little dresses are finished all around the edge with a tiny shell edge. Others have a fine rolled hem or tiny narrow binding.

Some of the commercial pattern companies are now selling patterns taken from these designs made by the specialists. All the patterns are so simple that even a young mother who has done very little sewing can use them. You can send for a leaflet of suggestions about making these baby clothes, also one giving information about patterns. Write the Bureau of Home Economics, Washington, D. C. for leaflet on infants clothes. On this leaflet you will also find designs for a baby's nightgown made of soft, knit cotton mesh and designed to keep the feet warm yet roomy enough to allow the baby to kick and a sleeping bag for winter use.

But whether you make the clothes for the baby yourself or whether you buy them, remember to select those that are comfortable, simple, and easy to launder.

